

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF PLANNING



PUBLIC SPACE APPLICATION REVIEW

DATE: July 15, 2010

FROM: Joshua Ghaffari, Citywide Planner

ADDRESS: 505 8th Street, SE

APPLICATION: Unenclosed sidewalk café for 2 tables and 8 seats

Site Information

Zone: CHC/C-2-A

Historic District: Capitol Hill

CFA: No

Neighborhood Character: Neighborhood commercial district

Background:

This application was received by the Office of Planning on June 3, 2010. The proposed café has been reviewed and approved by historic preservation office staff. This café is for a business with a Certificate of Occupancy for a restaurant.

In April 2009, the Public Space Committee approved with conditions a sidewalk cafe at 521 8th Street, SE. The applicant was required to maintain an 8' clear pedestrian path.

Relevant Policies of Planning Initiatives

Policy T-2.4.4: Sidewalk Obstructions

Locate sidewalk cafes and other intrusions into the sidewalk so that they do not present impediments to safe and efficient pedestrian passage. Maintain sidewalk surfaces and elevations so that disabled or elderly pedestrians can safely use them. 410.8

Policy UD-3.1.8: Neighborhood Public Space

Provide urban squares, public plazas, and similar areas that stimulate vibrant pedestrian street life and provide a focus for community activities. Encourage the “activation” of such spaces through the design of adjacent structures; for example, through the location of shop entrances, window displays, awnings, and outdoor dining areas.

Policy UD-3.10: Sidewalk Cafes

Discourage the enclosure of sidewalk cafes in manner that effectively transforms them into indoor floor space. The design of sidewalk cafes should be compatible with the architectural qualities of the adjoining buildings, should complement the street environment, and should not impede pedestrian movement.

KEY ISSUES

The property is located in the Capitol Hill neighborhood on 8th Street, SE, between E and G Streets, SE. It is located in an area zoned CHC/C-2-A. There is a high level of pedestrian activity during working hours and at other times. This neighborhood is predominantly characterized as residential with neighborhood serving commercial.

The sidewalk where the proposed café is located is along 8th Street and is 20 feet wide. The adjacent business has a 3 foot shop window projection. There are 7 feet at the curb set aside for tree boxes and other street furniture. This leaves 10 feet to accommodate for pedestrians and café seating. The proposed seating area includes 2 tables and 8 seats in an area that is 60 square feet.

The café area extends into the sidewalk 4 feet. This leaves 6 feet of unobstructed sidewalk between the café and the furniture zone at the curb. District regulations require a 10' clear pedestrian path adjacent to a sidewalk café, although the Public Space Committee has the authority to approve an adjacent clear pedestrian path of 6 feet. OP is trying to verify that a local community group has adopted guidelines that the clear sidewalk adjacent to a café should be 8'. The Public Space Committee required that an 8' clear width be maintained for a similar café at 521 8th Street, SE, in April 2009.

The Public Space Committee requires that there be 15 square feet for every seat within a dining area. With an area of 60 square feet, this sidewalk café has enough space for 4 seats; the application is for 8 seats.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION

Sidewalk cafes are one of the few ways that the District can activate public space in commercial areas. Wherever possible, the Office of Planning supports sidewalk cafes in public space. The sidewalk café is a welcome addition to this neighborhood.

The Office of Planning recommends that this application be approved with the condition that the number of seats be reduced to 4 and the clear adjacent sidewalk be maintained at 8'.